

BETHLEHEM  
BCP-6036

# EDDIE "CLEANHEAD" VINSON

CLEANHEAD'S



BACK IN TOWN

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# EDDIE "CLEANHEAD" VINSON

## CLEANHEAD'S BACK IN TOWN

## Side One

1. CLEANHEAD'S BACK IN TOWN (Eddie Vinson-Charles Taylor; Arranger: Ernie Wilkins) 2:58
2. THAT'S THE WAY TO TREAT YOUR WOMAN (Terry-Gray-Vinson; Arranger: Manny Albam) 2:28
3. TROUBLE IN MIND (Jones; Arranger: Manny Albam) 2:24
4. KIDNEY STEW (Blackman-Vinson; Arranger: Ernie Wilkins) 2:26
5. SWEET LOVIN' BABY (Darwin; Arranger: Harry Tubbs) 2:53
6. CALDONIA (Fleecie Moore; Arranger: Harry Tubbs) 2:47

## Side Two

1. IT AIN'T NECESSARILY SO (I. & G. Gershwin; Arranger: Ernie Wilkins) 2:44
2. CHERRY RED (Pete Johnson-Joe Turner; Arranger: Ernie Wilkins) 2:41
3. IS YOU IS OR IS YOU AIN'T (MY BABY) (Billy Austin-Louis Jordan; Arranger: Ernie Wilkins) 2:46
4. I JUST CAN'T KEEP THE TEARS FROM TUMBLIN' DOWN (Darwin; Arranger: Harry Tubbs) 3:08
5. YOUR BABY AIN'T SWEET LIKE ME (Terry-Gray-Vinson; Arranger: Ernie Wilkins) 2:26
6. HOLD IT RIGHT THERE (Terry-Gray-Vinson; Arranger: Harry Tubbs) 2:27

EDDIE "CLEANHEAD" VINSON, vocal and alto sax solos; JOE NEWMAN, trumpet; CHARLES FOWLKES, baritone; NAT PIERCE, piano; HENRY COKER, trombone; ED JONES, bass

BILL GRAHAM, alto; TURK VAN LAKE, guitar; GUS JOHNSON, drums; FRANK FOSTER, tenor  
(Side 1/Bands 1 & 5; Side 2/Band 5)

PAUL QUINICHETTE, tenor; ED THIGPEN, drums; CHARLES ROUSE, tenor; FREDDIE GREEN, guitar  
(Side 1/Bands 2, 3 & 6; Side 2/Band 6)

BILL GRAHAM, alto; TURK VAN LAKE, guitar; PAUL QUINICHETTE, tenor; ED THIGPEN, drums  
(Side 1/Band 4; Side 2/Bands 2 & 3)

BILL GRAHAM, alto; TURK VAN LAKE, guitar; PAUL QUINICHETTE, tenor  
(Side 2/Band 1)

BILL GRAHAM, alto; TURK VAN LAKE, guitar; GUS JOHNSON, drums; ED THIGPEN, drums; FRANK FOSTER, tenor  
(Side 2/Band 4)

"Run here pretty baby, Cleanhead's back in town," sings Eddie Vinson by way of introducing this album. Though it was recorded in New York in 1957 with an all-star band, it could have been recorded this year or in 1945, because Cleanhead's blues do not date. Gritty, sly, musical, sexy, full of wisdom and shot through with humor, these blues are equipment for living. Take that title tune. It establishes Cleanhead's persona—the seasoned traveller, the man who understands women, the natural-born lover—and manages to quote the titles of some of his rhythm and blues hits from the forties while doing so. But it isn't only, or even principally, a song of self-delectation. It's a song about feeling good and on top of it, a song that should make just about anybody feel that way.

Cleanhead is a natural vernacular artist. This does not mean he is unsophisticated in a jazz sense. As anyone who has heard him play a few club sets will attest, he knows his way around the chord progressions of a vast number of standards and is more than capable of carrying an entire program with his swinging, big-toned alto saxophone playing alone. But Cleanhead plays and sings what most critics would differentiate as jazz and blues all at the same time; he is a living embodiment of their essential oneness. The best example of that oneness on this album is "Sweet Lovin' Baby," wherein Cleanhead's alto saxophone solo echoes the grainy, choked sound of his voice and his vocal includes a squealing, sax-like falsetto passage. It isn't a case of imitation. The voice and saxophone are Janus-like aspects of a single, natural, vernacular individual.

Eddie Vinson was born in Houston, Texas on December 18, 1917. It is a truism among jazz fans that Texas has produced some outstanding saxophonists who preach the blues with unusual authority. It is equally true, but less widely known, that almost from the beginning Texas seems to have been a place where blues and jazz were very close. As in Oklahoma and Kansas City, early Texas jazz bands played a lot of blues. And the local bluesmen played in a much jazzier manner than their counterparts in Mississippi using complex melodic phrases that loped across bar lines and inserting passing chords where the Mississippians

would work variations on a hypnotic one-chord ostinato figure.

You can hear an early instance of this symbiosis on Will Day's "Central Avenue Blues," recorded when Eddie Vinson was eleven and included in the Yazoo album *Buddy Boy Hawkins and his Buddies*. The piece is demonstrably a down-home blues, but the guitarist uses some pretty chord voicings that anticipate the innovations of the first great electric bluesman, Texan T-Bone Walker. And an unknown clarinetist warbles a gutsy obligato behind the vocal that is ever so reminiscent of Cleanhead's sound and phrasing on the alto. Of course, there is a lot of Charlie Parker in Cleanhead's playing, but Parker was himself a product of the Southwestern blues and jump band tradition, and in the beginning he based his style on the work of saxophonist and clarinetist Buster Smith, who was born in Ellis County, Texas in 1904 and spent most of his life playing the blues in various jumping Southwestern bands.

Since he came of age during the big band era, Vinson gravitated to the orchestra format, and his abilities as both an altoist and singer made him a valuable asset. After work in some territory bands, he joined Cootie Williams's group, and between 1942 and 1945 he emerged as its most distinctive voice. He was the key performer on Williams's hits "Cherry Red" and "Somebody's Got to Go," so it was only natural that he would form his own band. It included sixteen musicians, and after he scored a hit with "Kidney Stew," Vinson took it into the Club Zanzibar on Broadway in New York City. In 1948-49 he led the group through a series of successful cross-country tours, and his booting records continued to sell well among black audiences.

By 1957, when Vinson made the present album, the bottom had dropped out of the big band business and blues shouting was being supplanted by various newer blues styles, some much smoother and some much rawer, and by rock and roll. Vinson had reduced his group to six pieces and then disbanded it and continued working as a single. It may be that in giving him an album session, Bethlehem records hoped to emulate the success of Big Joe Turner, another blues

shouter from the pre-war era who had made the unlikely transition to rock and roll stardom through some inventive hit records on Atlantic. Several of producer Chuck Darwin's contributions to the date, especially his song "I Just Can't Keep The Tears From Tumblin' Down," which is written on the 16-bar gospel changes then being popularized by Ray Charles, lend credence to this supposition. But in the choice of musicians and arrangers, this was a jazz date all the way. As we've noted, this apparent dichotomy was right up Cleanhead's alley.

In any event, the fine arrangements, by Ernie Wilkins, Manny Albam, and Harry Tubbs, and the swinging work by the band, composed mainly of alumni from the Count Basie orchestra, make this an especially vibrant Cleanhead collection. Several of the musicians turn in exceptional individual performances. The shouting trumpet obligatos heard behind a number of Cleanhead's vocal choruses are by Joe Newman, and Paul Quinichette, often called the Vice-Pres because of his aural resemblance to Lester Young, has several obligatos and a nice little break on "Caldonia."

The tune selection is interesting, too. "Caldonia" and "Is You Is Or Is You Aint My Baby" are both tributes to the seminal influence of Louis Jordan, whose gritty alto saxophone solos, funny blues vocals and rocking little band did so much to create and popularize the jump blues sound. "It Ain't Necessarily So" is done in the Cab Calloway manner, complete with scat choruses; another homage no doubt. As mentioned, "Cherry Red" and "Kidney Stew" are remakes of previous Vinson hits. "Trouble in Mind" is the archetypal 8-bar blues, written by the New Orleans jazz pioneer Richard M. Jones in the twenties from folk sources, and Cleanhead, Joe Newman, and arranger Manny Albam do an especially fine job with it. Notice Albam's orchestration of those rolling piano blues tremelos just after Cleanhead's alto solo.

So this is Mr. Cleanhead's blues, alternately soothing and rousing and always mellow and just right. Vinson is still very much alive and swinging, so if he comes through your town, don't fail to hear him. Once he's gone, we will never see his like again.

ROBERT PALMER

## BETHLEHEM



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**CLEANHEAD'S BACK IN TOWN  
EDDIE "CLEANHEAD" VINSON**

**SIDE A  
STEREO**

**BCP 6036  
(BCP 6036 A)**

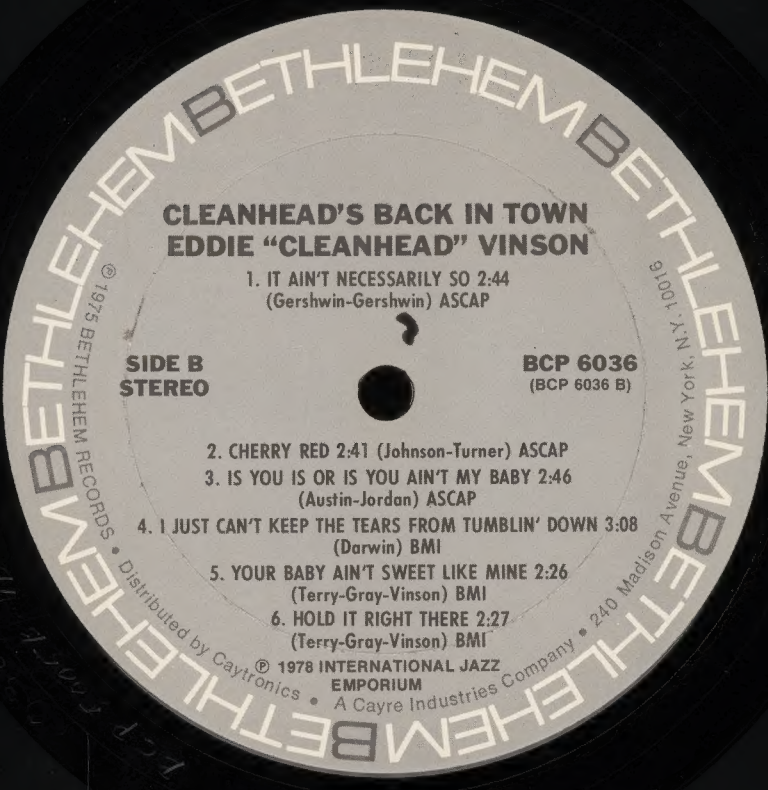
- 1. CLEANHEAD'S BACK IN TOWN 2:58 (Vinson-Taylor) BMI
- 2. THAT'S THE WAY TO TREAT YOUR WOMAN 2:28  
(Terry-Gray-Vinson) BMI
- 3. TROUBLE IN MIND 2:24 (Jones) ASCAP
- 4. KIDNEY STEW 2:26 (Blackman-Vinson) BMI
- 5. SWEET LOVIN' BABY 2:53 (Darwin) BMI
- 6. CALDONIA 2:47 (Moore) BMI

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1. IT AIN'T NECESSARILY SO 2:44  
(Gershwin-Gershwin) ASCAP

**SIDE B  
STEREO**

**BCP 6036  
(BCP 6036 B)**

2. CHERRY RED 2:41 (Johnson-Turner) ASCAP

3. IS YOU IS OR IS YOU AIN'T MY BABY 2:46  
(Austin-Jordan) ASCAP

4. I JUST CAN'T KEEP THE TEARS FROM TUMBLIN' DOWN 3:08  
(Darwin) BMI

5. YOUR BABY AIN'T SWEET LIKE MINE 2:26  
(Terry-Gray-Vinson) BMI

6. HOLD IT RIGHT THERE 2:27  
(Terry-Gray-Vinson) BMI

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